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THE GERMANS

AND THE

SMALL NATIONS

An Interview with

LORD FRENCH

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AN INTERVIEW WITH LORD FRENCH

By EDWARD PRICE BELL,

The London Correspondent of the CHICAGO DAILY NEWS.

“ I certainly think so,” was the most arresting statement made to myself to-day by Field-Marshal Lord French, Commander-in-Chief of the British Home Forces, in the course of a conversation I had with him in his office overlooking the Horse Guards Parade. My question had been :

“ Are the small neutral countries adjacent to Germany in danger of being overrun by the Teutonic armies, and in their turn treated as Belgium and others have been treated ? ”

“ I certainly think so,” replied this brilliant and sympathetic soldier, who, though almost naked of artillery, held the Teutonic legions at Ypres, saved the Channel ports, and made a vital turning-point in the war. One of my previous questions had been :

“How much can the Central Empires add to their military strength by impressing Belgians, Serbians, Poles, and Roumanians? How many thousands, or scores of thousands, of Germans may be thrown into the fighting fronts as a result of these impressments?”

Field-Marshal Lord French, speaking with characteristic animation and directness, said :

“Field fortification and spade-work are of far more importance and value to-day than at any previous time in the history of war. If the manual labour thus entailed can be carried out by impressing the populations of countries which have been subjugated by hostile troops, this, of course, would add immensely to the strength of the fighting fronts. There are many other ways in which the populations of subjugated countries can be used, and principally it is necessary to consider and determine the military value of impressed men on lines of communication. This also is of much increased importance in war to-day. It is difficult to assess this extra strength in actual figures.”

“If Germany were to give Holland, Denmark, Norway, and perhaps Sweden the choice of joining her or being subjugated, what would be the effect upon Germany’s military position?”

“The subjugation of these other States,” replied Lord French, “will increase German

military power in proportion as her military strength has been enhanced by impressing the populations of the smaller countries she already has overrun."

"Then are all these little States about Germany in the nature of life-buoys that she might seize if she were sinking?"

"Yes; I think so."

"If there had not been an overwhelming case for charity in Belgium what would the Allies have done?" I enquired.

"The strictly military interests of the Allies as regards Belgium, when that country had been occupied, leaving out of account all questions of humanity, would have been to apply the blockade to Belgium in the same way as to the Central Empires themselves. The right to blockade friendly or neutral territory occupied by an enemy is clearly recognized by the Hague Convention, and this recognition indicates what the military interests of a belligerent must be."

"What are these military interests? That is to say, what has it cost the Allies to be humane rather than military in Belgium?"

"The cost to the Allies of feeding Belgium may be reckoned as follows:—First, in money Britain and France have contributed to the

Relief Commission for Belgium, not counting what has been spent for the relief of Northern France, something like £22,000,000, at a very rough estimate. This is hard cash, spent in purchases of foodstuffs, freights, etc.

“ Second, in tonnage, the Allies have reduced the tonnage at their disposal in order to supply the needs of Belgium. To give an indication of this, in one month of 1916, ships chartered by the Relief Commission made thirty-four voyages from Canadian, United States, and Argentine ports to Rotterdam, and, owing to the illegal sowing of mines by Germans off the Dutch coast, and owing to more than one instance of the torpedoing of relief ships, the Allies have lost some twelve ships in the course of the relief work.

“ Third, indirect cost to the Allies has been even greater. In spite of all efforts to protect Belgian supplies and property, the Germans have taken large amounts of livestock and foodstuffs from the country. From time to time the neutral commission has succeeded in shutting down upon the seizures, but there have been continual recrudescences of these, and at the present moment the Germans again have begun to export livestock and foodstuffs from Belgium.

“ Far more serious, however, has been the gigantic financial robbery carried on by the

Germans in Belgium. This now must amount, at a very rough estimate, to 2,500,000,000 francs—say, \$500,000,000.

“ More serious still, if possible, have been the German seizures of raw materials and machinery of every kind. To sum up: The indirect cost to the Allies has been that of relieving the Germans of all responsibility for the maintenance of over seven million people, whom, under International Law, they were obliged to feed and maintain in health, and whom, moreover, they otherwise actually would have had either to feed or to deport wholesale, since it is impossible, from a military point of view, to have a starving population on the lines of communication of a great army.”

Such are the views and such the facts adduced by the man who commanded the British Army on the Continent uninterruptedly for seventeen months, and who, in that most famous of all the salients of the war, won the title of Viscount French of Ypres.

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